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Old Country

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The Old Country

Bill Elgersma

I do not see you
like I do not see the windmills
as I travel the dikes
which spill across the landscape like lava.
You are not here.

I see the neighbors
Ralph on his bike,
Sun, rain and snow,
stiff and straight, cigarette in mouth
braving the cars with no bike path protection
to get to work.
Klaas,
summer and winter
wooden shoes, no socks
as I watch city workers in Snake
slogging in mud.

you never biked
you never skated
you never sailed
you never swam

I remember your shudder
head and shoulders
on a damp fall day
when talking of being buried
with your feet wet.

As I pedal through towns
beside canals
in whimsical windy rain
I think I get it.

Moving to a country far removed
in the stickiness of yellow clay,
with not enough of anything to make a crop grow
sporadic rain, sporadic sunshine, sporadic money,
you found dry land, safety.
No lush pastures
no fourth cut of hay
corn was short, oats even worse
but the battle you chose
you fought on your terms.

You died as you lived,
on firm ground with feet dry,
roots deep to hold fast against strong winds
and no windmills in sight.